

THE MARCH OF THE WHITE GUARD.

In another half-hour the White Guard was at ease, and four of them were gathered about the great stove in the store, Cloud-in-the-Sky smoking placidly, and full of guttural emphasis; Late Carscallen moving his animal-like jaws with a sense of satisfaction; Gaspe Toujours talking in Chinook to the Indians, in patois to the French clerk, and in broken English to them all; and Jeff Hyde exclaiming on the wonders of the march, the finding of Varre Lepage at Manitou Mountain, and of himself and Gaspe Toujours buried in the snow.

In Jaspar Hume's house at midnight Varre Lepage lay asleep with his wife's letters—received through the Factor—clasped to his breast. The firelight played upon a face prematurely old—a dark disappointed face—a doomed face, as it seemed to the Factor.

"You knew him, then," the Factor said, after a long silence.

"Yes; I knew him well, years ago," replied Jaspar Hume.

Just then the sick man stirred in his sleep, and said disjunctively, "I'll make it all right to you, Jaspar." Then came a pause and a quicker utterance, "Rose—I—love you—forgive—forgive!"

The Factor rose and turned to go, and Jaspar Hume, with a despairing, sorrowing gesture, went over to the bed.

Again the voice said, "Ten years—I have repented ten years—My wife—Don't, don't—I dare not speak—Jaspar, forgive me! Oh, Rose!"

The Factor touched Jaspar Hume's arm. "This is delirium," he said. "He has fever. You and I must nurse him, Hume. You can trust me—you understand."

"Yes, I can trust you," was the reply. "But I can tell you nothing."

"I do not want to know anything. If you can watch till two o'clock I will relieve you. I'll send the medicine chest over. You know how to treat him."

The Factor passed out and the other was left alone with the man who had wronged him. The feeling most active in his mind was pity, and as he prepared a draught from his own stock of medicines, he thought of the past and the present all over. He knew that however much he had suffered, this man had suffered more. And in this silent night there was broken down any slight barrier that may have stood between Varre Lepage and his complete compassion. Having effaced himself from the calculation, justice became forgiveness.

He moistened the sick man's lips and bathed his forehead, and roused him once to take a quieting powder. Then he sat down and wrote to Rose Lepage. But he tore the letter up again and said to the dog, "No, Jacques, I cannot; the Factor must do it. She needn't know yet that it was I with the White Guard who saved him. It doesn't make any burden of gratitude for her, if my name is kept out of it. And the Factor mustn't mention me, Jacques—not yet. And when he is well we will go to London with it, Jacques, and we needn't meet her; and it will be all right, Jacques, all right!"

And the dog seemed to understand; for he went over to the box that held it; and looked at his master. And Jaspar Hume rose and broke the seal and unlocked the box and opened it; but he heard the sick man moan and he closed it again and went over to the bed. The feeble voice said, "I must speak—I cannot die so—not so—Jaspar."

And Jaspar Hume murmured, "God help him." And he moistened the lips once again, and put a cold cloth on the fevered head, and then sat down by the fire again. And Varre Lepage slept. As if some charm had been in that "God help him," the restless hands grew quiet, the breath became more regular, and the tortured mind found a short peace. With the old debating look in his eyes, Jaspar Hume sat until the Factor relieved him.

CHAPTER V.

Reunited.

FEBRUARY and March and April were past and May was come. Varre Lepage had had a hard struggle for life, but he had survived. For weeks every night there was a repetition of that first night after the return; delicious self-condemnation, entreaty, and love of his wife, and Jaspar Hume's name mentioned now and again in shuddering remorse. With the help of the Indian who had shared the sick man's sufferings in the Barren Grounds, the Factor and Jaspar Hume nursed him back to life.

It is the 10th of May. In an armchair made of hickory and birchbark by Cloud-in-the-Sky sits Varre Lepage reading a letter from his wife. She is at Winnipeg, and is coming west as far as Regina to meet him on his way down. He looks a wreck; but a handsome wreck! His refined features, his soft black beard and blue eyes, his graceful hand and gentle manners, one would scarcely think belonged to an evil-hearted man. He sits in the sunlight at the door, wrapped about in moose and beaver skins. This world of plain and wood is glad. Not so Varre Lepage. He sat and thought of what was to come. He had hoped at times that he would die, but twice Jaspar Hume had said, "I demand your life; you owe it to your wife—to me—to God!" And he had pulled his heart up to this demand and had lived. But what lay before him? He saw a stony track, and he shuddered. The Bar of Justice and Restitution raised its cold barriers before him; and he was not strong!

As he sat there facing his future Jaspar Hume came to him and said, "If you feel up to it, Lepage, we will start for Edmonton and Shovanne on Monday. I think it will be quite safe, and your wife is anxious. I shall accompany you as far as Edmonton; you can then proceed to Shovanne by easy stages, and so on east in the pleasant weather. Are you ready to go?"

"Yes! I am ready."

On a beautiful May evening Varre Lepage, Jaspar Hume and the White Guard are welcomed at Fort Edmonton by the officer in command of the Mounted Police. They are to enjoy the hospitality of the Fort for a couple of days before they pass on. Jaspar Hume is to go back with Cloud-in-the-Sky and Late Carscallen and a number of Indian carriers, for this is a journey of business, too. Gaspe Toujours and Jeff Hyde are to press on with Varre Lepage, who is now much stronger and better. One day passes, and on the following morning Jaspar Hume gives instructions to Gaspe Toujours and Jeff Hyde and makes preparations for his going back. He is standing in the Barracks Square, when a horseman rides in and inquires of a sergeant standing near if Varre Lepage has arrived at the Fort. A few words bring out the fact that Rose Lepage is nearing the Fort from the south, being determined to come on from Shovanne to meet her husband. The trooper thinks she is now about eight or ten miles away, but is not sure. He had been sent on ahead the day before, but his horse having met with a slight accident, he had been delayed. He had seen the party, however, a long distance back in the early morning. He must now ride away and meet Mrs. Lepage, he said. He was furnished with a fresh horse and he left, bearing a message to the loyal wife from Varre Lepage.

Jaspar Hume decided to leave Fort Edmonton at once and take all the White Guard back with him, and he gave orders to that effect. He entered the room where Varre Lepage sat alone and said: "Varre Lepage, the time has come for us to say good-by. I am starting at once for Fort Providence."

But the other replied: "You will wait until my wife comes. You must." There was pain in his voice.

"I must not."

Varre Lepage braced himself for a heavy task and said: "Jaspar Hume, if the time has come to say good-by, it has also come when we should speak together for once openly; to settle, in so far as can be done, a long account. You have not let my wife know who saved me. That appears from her letters. She asks the name of my rescuer. I have not yet told her. But she will know that today, when I tell her all."

"When you tell her all?"

"When I tell her all."

"But you shall not do that."

"I will. It will be the beginning of the confession which I shall afterward make to the world."

"By Heaven! you shall not do it. Coward! Would you wreck her life?" Jaspar Hume's face was wrathful and remained so till the other sank back in the chair with his forehead in his hands; but it softened as he saw this remorse and shame. He began to see that Varre Lepage had not clearly grasped the whole situation. He said in quieter, but still firm tones: "No, Lepage, that matter is between us two, and us alone. She must never know—the world therefore must never know. You did an unmanly thing; you are suffering a manly remorse. Now let it end here—but I swear it shall," he said in fierce tones as the other shook his head negatively: "I would have let you die at Manitou Mountain if I had thought you would dare to take away your wife's peace—your children's respect."

"I have no children; our baby died."

Jaspar Hume again softened. "Can you not see, Lepage? The thing cannot be mended." Just then his hand touched the book that he still carried in his bosom, and as if his mother had whispered to him, he continued: "I bury it all, and so must you. You will begin the world again—old friend—and so shall I."

Keep your wife's love and respect. Henceforth you will deserve it."

Varre Lepage raised moist eyes to the other and said: "But you will take back the money I got for that!"

There was a pause, then Jaspar Hume replied: "Yes, upon such terms, times and conditions as I shall hereafter fix. And you have no child, Lepage?" he gently added.

"We have no child; it died with my fame."

Jaspar Hume looked steadily into the eyes of the man who had wronged him. "Remember, Varre, you begin the world again. I am going now. By the memory of old days, good-by," and he held out his hand. Varre Lepage took it and rose tremblingly to his feet, and said: "You are a good man, Jaspar Hume. Good-by."

The Sub-Factor turned at the door. "If it will please you, tell your wife that I saved you. Some one will tell her; perhaps I would rather—at least it would be more natural if you did it." He passed out into the heat of a machine that streamed into the room and fell across the figure of Varre Lepage, who sat and said dreamily: "And begin the world again."

Before Jaspar Hume mounted, almost immediately after, to join the White Guard now ready for the journey back, Jacques sprang upon him and passed his nose against his master's heart. And once again, and for the last time that we shall hear it, Jaspar Hume said: "It's all right, Jacques."

And then they started for the north again. As they were doing so a shadow fell across the sunlight that streamed upon Varre Lepage. He looked up. There was a startled cry of joy, an answering exclamation of love, and Rose Lepage was locked in her husband's arms.

A few moments after and the sweet-faced woman said: "Who was that man who rode away to the north as I came up, Varre? He reminded me of some one, but I can't think who it is."

"That was the leader of the White Guard, the man who saved me, my wife." He paused a moment and then solemnly said: "That man was Jaspar Hume!"

The wife rose to her feet with a spring. "He saved you! He saved you! Jaspar Hume—oh, Varre!"

"He saved me, Rose!"

Her eyes were wet. "And he would not stay and let me thank him! Poor fellow! Poor Jaspar—Hume! Has he then been up here these ten years?"

Her face was flushed and pain was struggling with the joy she felt in seeing her husband again.

"Yes, he has been up here all that time!"

"He has not succeeded in life, Varre!" and her thoughts went back to the days when, blind and ill, Jaspar Hume went away for health's sake, and she remembered how sorry then she felt for him, and how grieved she was that when he came back strong and well he did not come near her or her husband, and offered no congratulations. She had not deliberately wronged him. She did not know he wished her to be his wife. She knew he cared for her; but so did Varre Lepage. A promise had been given to neither when Jaspar Hume went away; and after that she grew to love the successful, kind-mannered genius who became her husband. Even in this happiness of hers, sitting once again at her husband's feet, she thought with a tender and glowing kindness of the man who had cared for her eleven years ago, and who had but now saved her husband.

"He has not succeeded in life," she repeated softly.

Looking down at her, his brow burning with a white heat, Varre Lepage said, "He is a great man, my wife."

"I am sure he is a good man," she added.

Perhaps Varre Lepage had borrowed some strength from Jaspar Hume, for he said almost sternly, "He is a great man."

His wife looked up half-startled at his tone, and said: "Yes, dear, he is a good man—and a great man."

The sunlight still came in through the open door. The Saskatchewan flowed swiftly between its verdant banks, an eagle went floating away to the west, robins made vocal a solitary tree, a few yards away, troopers moved back and forward across the square, and a hen and her chickens came fluttering to the threshold. The wife looked at the yellow brood drawing close to their mother and her eyes grew wistful. She thought of their one baby asleep in an English grave. But thinking of the words of the captain of the White Guard, Varre Lepage said, "We will begin the world again, my wife."

She smiled and rose to kiss his forehead, as the hen and chickens hastened away from the door, and a clear bugle call sounded in the square.

"Yes, dear," she said, "we will begin the world again."

CHAPTER VI.

Eleven Years Later.

ELEVEN years have gone since that scene was enacted at Edmonton, and the curtain rises for the last act of that drama of life which is connected with the brief history of the White Guard.

A great gathering is dispersing from a hall in Piccadilly. It has been drawn together to do honor to a man who has achieved a triumph in engineering science. As he steps from the platform to go he is greeted by a fusillade of cheers. He bows calmly and kindly. He is a man of vigorous yet reserved aspect; he has a rare individuality. He receives with a quiet cordiality the congratulations of his friends. He remains for some time in conversation with a royal Duke, who takes his arm and with him passes into the street. The Duke is a member of this great man's club, and offers him a seat in his brougham. Amid the cheers of the people they drive away together. Inside the club there are fresh congratulations, and it is proposed to arrange an impromptu dinner, at which the Duke will preside. But with modesty and honest thanks the great man declines. He pleads an engagement. He had pleaded this engagement the day before to a well-known society. After his health is proposed he makes his adieus, and leaving the club, walks away toward a West End square. In one of its streets he pauses and enters a building called "Providence Chambers." His servant hands him a cablegram. He passes to his library, and standing before the fire, opens it. It reads: "My wife and I send congratulations to the great man."

Jaspar Hume stands for a moment looking at the fire, and then says simply: "I wish my poor old Jacques were here." He then sits down and writes this letter:

"My Dear Friends—Your cablegram has made me glad. The day is over. My last idea was more successful than I even dared to hope; and the world has been kind. I went down to see your boy, Jaspar, at Clifton last week. It was the 13th, his birthday, you know; ten years old; and a clever, strong-minded little fellow. He is quite contented. As he is my god-child, I again claimed the right of putting a thousand dollars to his credit in the bank—I have to speak of dollars to you people living in Canada—which I have done on his every birthday. When he is twenty-one he will have twenty-one thousand dollars—a fine faculty for science. In the summer, as I said, I will bring him over to you. There is nothing more to say to-night except that I am as always, Your faithful friend, JASPAR HUME."

A moment after the letter was finished the servant entered and announced "Mr. Late Carscallen." With a smile and hearty greeting the great man and this member of the White Guard met. It was to entertain his old Arctic comrade that Jaspar Hume had declined to be entertained by society or club. A little while after, seated at the table, the ex-Sub-Factor said: "You found your brother well, Carscallen?"

The jaws moved slowly as of old. "Ay, that, and a grand minister, Captain."

"Ay, that; but there's no place for me like Fort Providence."

"Try this pheasant. And you are Sub-Factor now, Carscallen?"

"There's two of us Sub-Factors—Jeff Hyde and myself. Mr. Field is old and can't do much work, and trade is heavy now."

"Yes; I hear from the Factor now and then. And Gaspe Toujours?"

"He went away three years ago, but he said he'd come back. He never did though. Jeff Hyde believes he will. He says to me a hundred times: 'Carscallen, he made the sign of the cross that he'd come back from St. Gabriel, and that's next to the Book with a Papist. If he's alive he'll come!'"

"Perhaps he will, Carscallen. And Cloud-in-the-Sky?"

"He's still there, and comes in and smokes with Jeff Hyde and me, as he used to do with you, sir; but he doesn't obey our orders as he did those of the Captain of the White Guard. He said to me when I left, 'You see Strong-back, tell him Cloud-in-the-Sky good Indian—he never forget. How!'"

Jaspar Hume raised his glass with smiling and thoughtful eyes: "To Cloud-in-the-Sky and all who never forget!" he said.

(The End.)

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